

# Personal Evangelism or Social Reform? The Challenge to Brazilian Presbyterianism in the Nineteenth Century

**BRUNO GONÇALVES ROSI**

## **Abstract**

This article analyses how Presbyterian missionaries and the early pastors in Brazil answered the call to help lead the country to material progress. In terms of organization, it follows the chronological order of a scheme traditional among historians of Presbyterianism in Brazil: beginning, consolidation, and dissent. It begins with the antecedents and mostly the work of the pioneer James Cooley Fletcher. While some leaders wanted to help Brazil develop as a nation, most workers in the early Presbyterian Church had a more conservative approach. They were not necessarily antagonistic to the material progress the gospel could bring but favored personal evangelism as their main goal. Debates on this issue would mark the early denomination, especially in its dissent phase.

## **Keywords**

*Ashbel Green Simonton, James Cooley Fletcher, Brazilian history, missionary history, missions to Brazil, evangelism, social work*

---

## Introduction

Until the nineteenth century, Brazil was almost entirely a Roman Catholic country. John Calvin himself sent missionaries to Rio de Janeiro in the sixteenth century, and the Dutch Reformed Church followed when the Netherlands occupied a great part of the Brazilian northeast in the seventeenth century. However, despite these isolated episodes, from 1500 to 1800 there was almost no Protestantism in Brazil. This started to change early in the nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup> In 1808, the Portuguese royal family fled to Rio de Janeiro, running away from Napoleon. In 1822, Brazil claimed its independence from Portugal. The constitution that ruled Brazil from 1824 to 1889 was at least partially liberal<sup>2</sup>: although it maintained Roman Catholicism as the country's official religion, it granted religious freedom to non-Catholics. Protestant immigrants started to arrive already in the 1820s, and Protestant missionaries began planting Brazilian churches in the 1850s and 1860s.

No group was as active as the Presbyterians in planting Brazilian churches in the nineteenth century. The Presbyterian Church in Brazil was founded by Ashbel Green Simonton (1833–1867). Born in West Hanover, Pennsylvania, from a traditional Presbyterian family, he was named after Ashbel Green, president of New Jersey College, from which he eventually graduated. After college, he spent about a year and a half in Mississippi, working as a teacher for young boys. Disappointed with the local authorities' disinterest in schools, he went back to Pennsylvania and tried to become a lawyer, although by that time many people advised him to become a minister. In 1855, after a deeply religious experience during a revival meeting, Simonton enrolled in Princeton Seminary. In his first year there, he heard a sermon by Charles Hodge in the chapel and decided to become a missionary. He arrived in Brazil in 1859. He was followed by his sister, Elizabeth Wiggins Simonton (1822–1879), and his brother-in-law, Alexander Latimer Blackford (1829–1900). Elizabeth was a graduate of the Women's Seminary in Newark and Blackford from Western Theological Seminary. Several other collaborators joined them in the following years. In 1862, they saw the first Brazilian converts.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Vicente Temudo Lessa, *Annaes da 1ª Igreja Presbiteriana de São Paulo: Subsídios para a História do Presbiterianismo Brasileiro* (São Paulo: 1ª Igreja Presbiteriana Independente de São Paulo, 1938), 11–17.

<sup>2</sup> Whenever I use the term liberal in this article, I mean liberal in the classical sense of the term, in which Adam Smith and John Locke were liberals.

<sup>3</sup> Ashbel Green Simonton, *O Diário de Simonton, 1852–1866*, 2nd rev. ed. (São Paulo: Casa Editora Presbiteriana, 2002), 152.

Presbyterians and other Protestants were favored by the generally liberal religious policy of the Brazilian authorities. However, this policy presented the Presbyterian church in Brazil with one of its first challenges: should it focus on personal evangelism or social change? Brazilian political leaders were eager to modernize the country, and they saw the missionaries and early Brazilian pastors as potential partners in this task. The United States was understood by some to be a model for Brazilian progress and Protestantism one of the factors that lead to American modernization.

### **I. Antecedents of Presbyterian Work in Brazil**

James Cooley Fletcher (1823–1901) was a pioneer of the Protestant missionary work in Brazil and in many ways an interesting contrast to other missionaries who would follow. Fletcher was in Brazil at least four times between 1852 and 1869. Like Ashbel Green Simonton and other Presbyterian pastors who worked in Brazil, he had gone to Princeton Seminary. One difference is that Fletcher completed his studies in Europe. Not long after his return to America, he was ordained by the Presbytery of Muncie, Indiana, in 1851.<sup>4</sup> In the same year, he was sent to Rio de Janeiro as a missionary for the American and Foreign Christian Union and chaplain of the American Seamen's Friend Society.

Fletcher arrived in Brazil in 1852.<sup>5</sup> This mission and its religious activities were negotiated with the Brazilian government by Robert Cumming Schenck, Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary of the United States to Brazil and Argentina, giving Fletcher thereby official protection.<sup>6</sup> Very early in his stay, Fletcher concluded that his duty was not only to be a pastor to seamen and Americans residing in Rio but also to evangelize the Brazilians.<sup>7</sup> The positions held in the Legation between 1852 and 1853 allowed him to make friends in the court, almost all of liberal inclination who supported the causes he advocated. One of the highlights of this initial

---

<sup>4</sup> Besides the fact that he studied in Princeton, several minutes from the general assembly show that Fletcher was part of the Old School. The Muncie Presbytery appears in the 1851 minutes. Fletcher is mentioned in the PCUSA Old School General Assembly minutes of 1854, 1855, 1857, and 1859 to 1868. *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America* (New York: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1854–).

<sup>5</sup> David James, "O Imperador do Brasil e os seus Amigos da Nova Inglaterra," in *Anuário do Museu de Petrópolis* (Petrópolis: Ministério da Educação e Saúde, 1952), 13:23.

<sup>6</sup> Lessa, *Annaes da 1ª Igreja Presbyteriana de São Paulo*, 186.

<sup>7</sup> Indiana Historical Society, *Calvin Fletcher Papers*, Letter no. 493. I also want to give credit to David Gueiros Vieira, *O Protestantismo, a Maçonaria e a Questão Religiosa no Brasil* (Brasília: Editora Universidade de Brasília, 1980), who made the same observation long before me.

period serving in the American diplomatic corps was meeting the Brazilian emperor, Dom Pedro II, in September 1852. Fletcher had to return to the United States in 1854, but he had started the work that would occupy him for many years: to draw the two countries together, removing the barriers of mutual ignorance that hindered closer contacts.<sup>8</sup> Back in Brazil in 1855, now as an agent of the American Bible Society, Fletcher got closer to Dom Pedro II and deliberately became an intermediary between the emperor and several American scholars and writers. The result was a long-lasting friendship between the Emperor and his “friends from New England.” Beginning in 1863, Fletcher and Dom Pedro II started a correspondence that would last until the decease of the latter.<sup>9</sup>

One of the highlights of Fletcher’s mission in Brazil<sup>10</sup> was the book *Brazil and the Brazilians, Portrayed in Historical and Descriptive Sketches*, first published in 1857. Initially an expansion of the work *Sketches of Residence and Travel in Brazil*, written by the Methodist missionary Daniel Parish Kidder and published in 1845, *Brazil and the Brazilians* reached another dimension through Fletcher’s contribution. For many years it was the key book about Brazil in the English language.<sup>11</sup> It was even used as a reference by the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church of the United States of America (hereafter, PCUSA) for many years (see Kidder and Fletcher, *Brazil and the Brazilians, Portrayed in Historical Sketches of Presbyterian Missions*, 1891 and 1897 editions).

---

<sup>8</sup> Daniel Parish Kidder and James Cooley Fletcher, *Brazil and the Brazilians, Portrayed in Historical and Descriptive Sketches*, 9th ed. (Philadelphia: Childs & Peterson, 1879), 237–38.

<sup>9</sup> Kidder and Fletcher, *Brazil and the Brazilians*, 9th ed., 249–50. Vieira, *O Protestantismo*, 73.

<sup>10</sup> For a more detailed account of Fletcher’s life and mission in Brazil, see Bruno G. Rosi, “James Cooley Fletcher, o missionário amigo do Brasil,” *Almanack* 1 (2013): 62.

<sup>11</sup> Charles Frederick Hartt, *Geology and Physical Geography of Brazil* (Boston: Fields, Osgood, 1870); Hubert W. Brown, *Latin America: The Pagans, the Papists, the Patriots, the Protestants, and the Present Problem* (New York: Young People’s Missionary Movement of the United States and Canada, 1909); Samuel R. Gammon, *The Evangelical Invasion of Brazil or a Half-Century of Evangelical Missions in the Land of the Southern Cross* (Richmond, VA: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1910); John Francis Normano, *Brazil, a Study of Economic Types* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1935); Cândido Mello-Leitão, *O Brasil visto pelos Ingleses* (São Paulo: Companhia Editora Nacional, 1937); Arthur Ramos, *A aculturação negra no Brasil* (São Paulo: Companhia Editora Nacional, 1942); Lilian Ellwyn Elliott, *Brazil Today and Tomorrow* (New York: Macmillan, 1917); Clayton Sedgwick Cooper, *The Brazilians and Their Country* (London: Heinemann, 1919); W. Reginald Wheeler, Robert Gardner McGregor, Maria Mcilvaine Gillmore, Ann Townsend Reid, and Robert E. Speer, *Modern Missions in Chile and Brazil* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1926); and Alberto de Faria, *Mauá, Irineo Evangelista de Souza, Barão e Visconde de Mauá* (São Paulo: Companhia Editora Nacional, 1933).

## II. *Beginning of Presbyterian Work in Brazil*

The PCUSA created a mission board, headquartered in New York, in 1837, and in a few years sent missionaries to several countries. Brazil was the sixth nation to receive missionaries from them.<sup>12</sup> Soon after Simonton arrived in Brazil, the Civil War broke out in the United States. This led to the division of his church into the PCUSA in the North and the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America (PCCSA) in the South, renamed Presbyterian Church in the United States (PCUS) after the war. The PCUS immediately created its own mission board in Nashville. In 1869, following Robert Lewis Dabney's suggestion, they sent Edward Lane and George N. Morton to Brazil.<sup>13</sup>

The Old Princeton theology was the main influence on missionaries and early pastors in the early Presbyterian church in Brazil. The PCUSA sent twenty-nine missionaries to Brazil between 1859 and 1900. Of these, thirteen were Princeton graduates, five had graduated from Western Theological Seminary, three from McCormick Seminary in Chicago, and three others from Lane Theological Seminary. Western Seminary, where Blackford and others studied, was also "Princetonian."<sup>14</sup>

In the same period, the PCUS sent twenty-eight missionaries to Brazil. Nineteen of these had graduated from Union Theological Seminary, four from Columbia Seminary, and six from other places. Their main theological influence was Dabney,<sup>15</sup> who had proposed that the PCUS should start a mission field in Brazil. Dabney's theology was pretty much the same as Hodge's, except for his sad defense of slavery.

From these figures, we see that the missionaries sent to Brazil came from a very uniform theological education.<sup>16</sup> They were American Presbyterian Calvinists with some inclination to revival.<sup>17</sup> The Rio de Janeiro Presbytery, subordinated to the Baltimore Synod, voted against the reunion of the Old and New School in 1868.<sup>18</sup> Although this might be an anachronistic way to

<sup>12</sup> Alderi S. Matos, *Os pioneiros Presbiterianos do Brasil, 1859–1900: Missionários, pastores e leigos do século 19* (São Paulo: Editora Cultura Cristã, 2004), 13–14.

<sup>13</sup> Júlio Andrade Ferreira, *História da Igreja Presbiteriana do Brasil* (São Paulo: Casa Editora Presbiteriana, 1992), 1:247–48. Matos, *Os pioneiros Presbiterianos do Brasil*, 13–14.

<sup>14</sup> Ribeiro, *Igreja Evangélica e República Brasileira*, 193–204.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 199.

<sup>16</sup> Alderi Souza de Matos, "A pregação dos pioneiros Presbiterianos no Brasil," *Fides Reformata* 9.2 (2004): 62.

<sup>17</sup> Ribeiro, *Igreja Evangélica e República Brasileira*, 196–97, 214–19.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 195.

put it, the Brazilian church was frankly Old School with very little influence of modernism.<sup>19</sup>

When Ashbel Green Simonton arrived in Brazil in 1859, he carried presentation letters, provided by Fletcher, to some “high class” Brazilians.<sup>20</sup> Fletcher himself was again in Brazil between 1862 and 1863, this time as an agent of the American Sunday School Union, and he took the time to visit his Presbyterian colleagues in Rio de Janeiro.<sup>21</sup> There seems to have been a disagreement between him and other missionaries. Simonton and especially Blackford were suspicious of Fletcher, his motives, and his methodology.<sup>22</sup> Although I believe that these quarrels faded away with the years,<sup>23</sup> they are key to an understanding of the different approaches the missionaries had to the work in Brazil.<sup>24</sup>

Fletcher was in Brazil a fourth time between 1864 and 1865, this time as an envoy from the American State Department to work with the Brazilian Parliament promoting the establishment of a steamship line connecting Rio de Janeiro and New York. Simonton also wrote the PCUSA mission board about this in unfavorable terms. It was hard for him to see how Fletcher’s work could be described as “missionary.” Between 1868 and 1869, Fletcher would make his last trip to Brazil, at this time as an agent of the American Tract Society.<sup>25</sup>

Even if he did not have a good relationship with the other Presbyterian missionaries, Fletcher could counterbalance that rejection significantly by

---

<sup>19</sup> The modernist controversy was delayed in Brazil until the 1930s. Ribeiro, *Igreja Evangélica e República Brasileira*, 198.

<sup>20</sup> Vieira, *O Protestantismo*, 135.

<sup>21</sup> Lessa, *Annaes da 1ª Igreja Presbiteriana de São Paulo*, 22, 51; Antônio Bandeira Trajano, “Esboço Histórico da Igreja Evangélica Presbiteriana,” in *Quadragesimo aniversário da Igreja Evangélica Presbiteriana do Rio de Janeiro, 1862–1902* (Rio de Janeiro: Casa Editora Presbiteriana, 1902), 13.

<sup>22</sup> Vieira, *O Protestantismo*, 161.

<sup>23</sup> Daniel Parish Kidder and James Cooley Fletcher, *Brazil and the Brazilians, Portrayed in Historical and Descriptive Sketches*, 6th ed. (Philadelphia: Childs & Peterson, 1866), 160. Daniel Parish Kidder and James Cooley Fletcher, *Brazil and the Brazilians, Portrayed in Historical and Descriptive Sketches*, 8th ed. (Philadelphia: Childs & Peterson, 1868), vi. Kidder and Fletcher, *Brazil and the Brazilians*, 9th ed., 160.

<sup>24</sup> On November 6, 1863, Simonton wrote to the board what Vieira called “a long and bitter letter” against Fletcher. Indeed, there are many complaints in the letter. Simonton accuses Fletcher of worldliness and calls his work “religious roguery.” Finally, he describes Fletcher as “a religious nuisance that should be abated.” Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, 2.116, A. G. S. to J. C. Lowrie, Rio, November 6, 1863. In my interpretation, Simonton had a hard time understanding—or accepting—Fletcher’s approach. Simonton was trying to plant a church among Brazilians. Fletcher was getting entangled in Brazilian politics, believing that this was the way to open Brazil for Simonton’s preaching.

<sup>25</sup> The way Simonton wrote to the board was not much better. Once again, it was hard for him to understand what Fletcher’s work had to do with missions. Vieira, *O Protestantismo*, 111.

his association with Aureliano Cândido Tavares Bastos (1839–1875), a congressman from the state of Alagoas and one of the main liberal leaders of his time. Thus he had a valuable ally and even a friend inside the Brazilian government.<sup>26</sup> Tavares Bastos mentions Fletcher in some of his writings as a counterbalance to the Americans whom he supposed to have imperialistic inclinations toward Brazil.<sup>27</sup> Tavares Bastos was elected to the Legislative General Assembly representing the Liberal Party. On this occasion he was, at the age of 22, the youngest member of Parliament.<sup>28</sup> He would be reelected for 1864–1866 and 1867–1870. One of his main contributions to Brazilian politics was his books and pamphlets, in which he defended liberal causes such as free trade, the abolition of slavery, and political and administrative decentralization. More closely connected to the missionaries, he defended religious freedom and the immigration of Protestants to Brazil.<sup>29</sup> He openly attributed to the “liberal spirit of the Protestant Reformation” the root of American prosperity.<sup>30</sup> It was because of this “liberal spirit” that he welcomed the first Protestant missionaries to Brazil.<sup>31</sup> He ended up becoming a friend of and lawyer for the Presbyterians in general, writing petitions and taking care of all their legal problems.<sup>32</sup> Although other Presbyterians preferred to resort to Tavares Bastos only in emergency, Fletcher was willing to have closer cooperation.

In 1866, Tavares Bastos participated in the founding of the Sociedade Internacional de Imigração (The International Immigration Society) and became one of its main leaders.<sup>33</sup> He believed that to achieve progress, Brazil

<sup>26</sup> Vieira, *O Protestantismo*, 95–97. Aureliano Cândido Tavares Bastos, *Cartas do Solitário*, 4th ed. (1862; repr., São Paulo: Companhia Editora Nacional 1975), 280–81, 331, 340–41.

<sup>27</sup> The history of how some Americans came to be seen as imperialistic towards Brazil is too long to be told here. I have written about it elsewhere. See Bruno G. Rosi, “Exploradores, missionários, cientistas e a abertura do Amazonas,” *Conjuntura Austral* 2 (2011): 67. For Fletcher and Tavares Bastos, see Vieira, *O Protestantismo*, 331. Gayle Thornbrough, Dorothy Riker, and Paula Corpuz, eds., *The Diary of Calvin Fletcher*, vol. 4: 1848–1852, *Including Letters to and from Calvin Fletcher* (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1975), xii; Gayle Thornbrough, Dorothy Riker, and Paula Corpuz, eds., *The Diary of Calvin Fletcher*, vol 5: 1853–1856, *Including Letters to and from Calvin Fletcher* (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1977), xx; Gayle Thornbrough, Dorothy Riker, and Paula Corpuz, eds., *The Diary of Calvin Fletcher*, vol. 6: 1857–1860, *Including Letters to and from Calvin Fletcher* (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1978), xxi. Tavares Bastos, *Cartas do Solitário*, 4th ed., 280–81, 331, and 338–40.

<sup>28</sup> For a more complete assessment of Tavares Bastos, see Bruno G. Rosi, “The Americanism of Aureliano Cândido Tavares Bastos,” *Almanack* 19 (2018): 244, doi:10.1590/2236-4633201806.

<sup>29</sup> Vieira, *O Protestantismo*, 97, 99, 324. Tavares Bastos, *Cartas do Solitário*, 4th ed., 97.

<sup>30</sup> Vieira, *O Protestantismo*, 357–58, 391–92.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 240.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 223, 236, 248, 250.

needed people of European descent, and the best way to attract immigrants from Europe to Brazil was through the United States.<sup>34</sup> His appeal for immigration was timely. After the Civil War, some Confederate veterans (unsatisfied with the defeat) showed themselves willing to move to Brazil. This interested the Brazilian elites, who were in search of a workforce to replace the Africans, since slavery was in the process of being abolished, especially after the end of the slave traffic in 1850.<sup>35</sup> The immigration of Confederates was one of the most prominent episodes in the relationship between Brazil and the United States during the nineteenth century. It was of great importance for the implementation of Presbyterianism in Brazil since to bring European and American immigrants, Brazil would have to grant them religious freedom.<sup>36</sup> For missionaries, the same religious freedom that would benefit the Confederates would also benefit Brazilians who became evangelicals.<sup>37</sup> Besides that, many American Presbyterian leaders from the South became involved in the Confederate immigration to Brazil, among whom was Dabney.<sup>38</sup> He was not only a professor but also a friend of George Nash Morton and especially Edward Lane.<sup>39</sup> This made Confederate immigration especially important in the plans of the PCUS mission.

Shortly after he arrived in Brazil, Simonton wrote to his superiors in New York that the Brazilians' openness to immigration would favor religious freedom and the preaching of the gospel. Nevertheless, that did not impress him too much. Simonton believed that the missionaries should not rely excessively on the "second intention" Brazilian liberals had for favoring missionary work.<sup>40</sup> Accordingly, he cautiously helped the immigration cause, always manifesting that his purpose was to favor religious freedom and above all the preaching to Brazilians.<sup>41</sup>

---

<sup>34</sup> Tavares Bastos, *Cartas do Solitário*, 4th ed., 164–66, 183–84, 276, 415.

<sup>35</sup> E. Bradford Burns, *A Aliança não Escrita: O Barão do Rio Branco e as Relações Brasil-EUA* (Brasília: Funag, 2003), 59.

<sup>36</sup> Aureliano Cândido Tavares Bastos, *Os Males do Presente e as Esperanças do Futuro*, 2nd ed. (1861; repr., São Paulo: Companhia Editora Nacional, 1976), 59–124. Anais da Câmara [the minutes of the Brazilian congress], July 10, 1867. Cited in Vieira, *O Protestantismo*, 243.

<sup>37</sup> Vieira, *O Protestantismo*, 224–27, 230–31.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 212–15. Thomas Cary Johnson, *The Life and Letters of Robert Lewis Dabney* (Richmond, VA: Presbyterian Committee Publication, 1903), 304–5.

<sup>39</sup> Johnson, *The Life and Letters of Robert Lewis Dabney*, 300, 316, 364, 368, 406, 408, 457–58.

<sup>40</sup> Vieira, *O Protestantismo*, 137, 234.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 228.

### III. *Consolidation of Presbyterian Work in Brazil*

Simonton became ill and passed away in 1867. In his short time serving in Brazil, Simonton had planted the first church in the country (1862), started a newspaper (1864), created the first presbytery (1865), and started training Brazilian pastors (1867). On the occasion of the presbytery being created, he had ordained the former Roman Catholic priest José Manoel da Conceição (1822–1873) as the first Brazilian pastor. Alexander Latimer Blackford, Francis Schneider, and George Chamberlain had been his main companions in Brazil, and they continued the work he started.

The presbyteries in Brazil tried, as much as possible, to subject future pastors to the same education they would receive in Princeton or other Old School seminaries in the United States. Hodge, father and son, were especially emphasized.<sup>42</sup> Formal education started with the establishment of a seminary in the municipality of Nova Friburgo, not far from Rio de Janeiro, in 1892, and in a theological institute in São Paulo in 1893. The two institutions were merged in 1894.<sup>43</sup> John Rockwell Smith (1846–1918) was the main professor. A graduate from Union Seminary (1871), he was sent to Brazil by the PCUS in 1873 and served there until his death. Smith tried to transmit to more than fifty men he trained for ministry what he had learned from Dabney.<sup>44</sup> Temudo Lessa, an early historian of the Presbyterian Church in Brazil and one of Smith's first students, described him as scholarly, pious, energetic, and devoted to his students, besides being a "rigid Calvinist."<sup>45</sup>

Another important factor in the early Presbyterian history in Brazil was the establishment of Christian schools and Mackenzie Presbyterian University in São Paulo. Very early in his time in Brazil, Simonton expressed his desire for the missionaries to found Protestant schools in the country.<sup>46</sup> Accordingly, in 1870, Mary Ann Annesley Chamberlain, George W. Chamberlain's wife, started what would eventually become Mackenzie Presbyterian University.<sup>47</sup> It was initially a small school in their house in

<sup>42</sup> Boanerges Ribeiro, *Protestantismo e Cultura Brasileira: Aspectos Culturais da Implantação do Protestantismo no Brasil* (São Paulo: Casa Editora Presbiteriana, 1981), 355–61. Francis Schneider even translated A. A. Hodge's *Outlines of Theology* into Portuguese. Ribeiro, *Igreja evangélica e república brasileira*, 195

<sup>43</sup> Alderi, *Os Pioneiros Presbiterianos do Brasil*, 63.

<sup>44</sup> Ribeiro, *Igreja evangélica e república brasileira*, 204.

<sup>45</sup> Lessa, *Annaes da 1ª Igreja Presbiteriana de São Paulo*, 289.

<sup>46</sup> Simonton, *O Diário de Simonton, 1852–1866*, 138. January 21, 1860 entry. Ashbel Green Simonton, "Os meios necessários e próprios para plantar o reino de Jesus Cristo no Brasil," in Simonton, *Diário*, 184.

<sup>47</sup> For Mackenzie and its trajectory in the nineteenth century, see Ribeiro, *Protestantismo e cultura brasileira*, 223–56, and Alderi Souza de Matos, "O Colégio Protestante de São Paulo:

São Paulo that served only Protestant children, but soon it started to grow, and non-Protestant parents started to send their sons and daughters there. Many members of the São Paulo elite sent their children to study with Mrs. Chamberlain and even helped the school with donations,<sup>48</sup> and non-Protestant teachers eventually started to work there. Dom Pedro II visited the school in 1878 and was impressed by what he saw, and, following his liberal leanings, he guaranteed religious freedom to the school.<sup>49</sup> The school grew greatly, and in 1885 Horace Manley Lane became its principal, and in 1891, it was named Colégio Protestante de São Paulo with Lane as its first president.

In 1873, Edward Lane and George Morton, the PCUS missionaries, started a similar school, the Colégio Internacional, in Campinas.<sup>50</sup> The school aimed to educate the Brazilian elite according to the American model. It did manage to attract people from the São Paulo elite, and it was also visited by Dom Pedro II.<sup>51</sup> Dabney had special care for this project and helped to secure its funds.<sup>52</sup> The school, however, faced many problems: though highly successful in the 1870s, it struggled to stay open in the 1880s. High costs and poor administration made it hard to attract new students, and it only started to grow again slowly in the 1890s.<sup>53</sup> In 1893, due to continuous outbreaks of yellow fever that hit the Campinas region, the school was transferred to Lavras, Minas Gerais, under the leadership of a new missionary, Samuel Rhea Gammon. The Colégio Internacional would later be renamed Instituto Presbiteriano Gammon.<sup>54</sup>

---

Um estudo de caso sobre o lugar da educação na estratégia missionária da igreja,” *Fides Reformata* 4.2 (1999), [https://cpaj.mackenzie.br/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/4\\_O\\_Colegio\\_Protestante\\_de\\_Sao\\_Paulo\\_Alder\\_Matos.pdf](https://cpaj.mackenzie.br/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/4_O_Colegio_Protestante_de_Sao_Paulo_Alder_Matos.pdf).

<sup>48</sup> Matos, “O Colégio Protestante de São Paulo”; Ribeiro, *Protestantismo e Cultura Brasileira*, 233. Among the donors were even the future Brazilian presidents Prudente de Moraes and Campos Sales.

<sup>49</sup> Ribeiro, *Protestantismo e Cultura Brasileira*, 223–24, 245–46. Lessa, *Annaes da 1ª Igreja Presbiteriana de São Paulo*, 151–57.

<sup>50</sup> Lessa, *Annaes da 1ª Igreja Presbiteriana de São Paulo*, 172.

<sup>51</sup> Ribeiro, *Protestantismo e Cultura Brasileira*, 199–221. José Custodio Alves de Lima, *Recordações de Homens e Causas do meu Tempo* (Rio de Janeiro: Livraria editora Leite Rebeiro Freitas, 1926), 57–59. Erasmo Braga, “O Collegio Internacional e seus fundadores,” *Revista do Centro de Ciências, Letras e Artes de Campinas* 3.44 (1916): 42, cited in Ribeiro, *Protestantismo e cultura brasileira*, 206. Júlio Andrade Ferreira, *História da Igreja Presbiteriana do Brasil* (São Paulo: Casa Editora Presbiteriana, 1992), 1:116.

<sup>52</sup> Johnson, *The Life and Letters of Robert Lewis Dabney*, 330, 358–59.

<sup>53</sup> Ferreira, *História da Igreja Presbiteriana do Brasil*, 1:115–18.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:487–502.

#### **IV. Dissent in Presbyterian Work in Brazil**

The years 1870 to 1888 were marked by tense debates about the future of Mackenzie, or more broadly, about the priorities of the PCUSA mission in Brazil. The missionaries, led by Blackford, were all Old School and wanted to focus on evangelism and church planting. Brazilian pastors, trained by missionaries, thought the same way.<sup>55</sup> Mackenzie became the focus of the disagreement. The missionaries feared that the PCUSA board in New York would transform Mackenzie into a New School institution.<sup>56</sup> The eventual failure of the Colégio Internacional also profoundly marked the attitudes of the PCUS mission board. In the 1870s, the board had already been recommending James Rockwell Smith not to engage in political disputes but to preach the gospel.<sup>57</sup> Later, disagreement over the place of education in the mission program (creation of secular schools, or direct evangelization?) would even lead to the division in the PCUS mission in 1906.<sup>58</sup>

Although they initially planted churches separately, the PCUSA and PCUS missionaries soon agreed to work together; they formed presbyteries and finally a synod in 1888 with three presbyteries, twenty missionaries, twelve Brazilian pastors, and sixty churches spread through most of the country. The veteran Blackford was the first moderator.

But the Presbyterian Church in Brazil would face its greatest challenge very soon. The Brazilian Synod wanted to focus on evangelism and on the seminary. The board in New York wanted them to focus on education, especially through Mackenzie.<sup>59</sup> However, the greatest challenge came from the clash between Eduardo Carlos Pereira (1855–1923), one of the first Brazilian pastors ordained by the missionaries, and Horace Manley Lane and other people connected with Mackenzie.

Ordained in 1881, Pereira very soon proved to be a powerful leader. His installation as senior pastor in the São Paulo church in 1888 and as the first Brazilian professor in the seminary in 1891 clearly reflects his abilities. Ironically, when Pereira was elected pastor in the São Paulo church, Horace

---

<sup>55</sup> Ribeiro, *Protestantismo e Cultura Brasileira*, 250–51; Ribeiro, *A Igreja Presbiteriana no Brasil, da Autonomia ao Cisma* (São Paulo: Livraria O Semeador, 1987), 215.

<sup>56</sup> Ribeiro, *Igreja Evangélica e República Brasileira*, 205.

<sup>57</sup> Ribeiro, *Protestantismo e Cultura Brasileira*, 303; David Gueiros Vieira, *Missionary Letters from Brazil, 1872–1875*, 347, cited in Matos, *Os Pioneiros Presbiterianos do Brasil*, 189.

<sup>58</sup> Matos, “O Colégio Protestante de São Paulo.”

<sup>59</sup> Pereira also opposed the presence of freemasons in the church. Although this was greatly emphasized in later popular accounts, my reading of the original sources tells me that it was not the main issue at the time. Besides, I believe that highlighting this would obscure the focus of this article.

Lane, a member of that church, proposed that the election should be considered unanimous. However, a few years later the two would disagree. Four main issues have usually been identified as the reason for the disagreement between Pereira and other leaders: personal questions, the missionary question, the educational question, and the freemasonry question.<sup>60</sup>

On the personal issues, Pereira was concerned that Lane too frequently was absent from Sunday services and especially from the communion services. Lane defended himself, saying that his work as a medical doctor often prevented him from coming to church. Pereira was not convinced, and in 1891, he voiced to some that Lane's election to Mackenzie had been "a disaster" because Lane lacked piety and therefore was unable to form a generation of pious men in the college.

In 1892, Pereira tried to formally discipline Lane in the São Paulo church but was overruled by the presbytery, mainly by Thomas Porter and William Waddell (1862–1939). Yet another Princeton graduate, Waddell had arrived in Brazil in 1890 and eventually made his way into the Mackenzie administration. Pereira also wanted the presbytery to discipline Emmanuel Vanorden, a pastor who had sided with Mackenzie's leaders. Once again, the presbytery overruled him. In response, leaders in the São Paulo church wrote to the board in New York, arguing that Waddell and Lane were not the right people to lead Mackenzie. It did not help that in December that year Lane fired from Mackenzie the professor Remígio de Cerqueira Leite, a member of the São Paulo church and a great defender of his pastor.

With regard to the missionary question, Pereira argued that it was time for the Brazilian church to be nationalized. The New York board disagreed with him, arguing that because the American missionaries were affiliated with both the Brazil church and their churches in the United States, they should maintain their affiliation in America. Also, while the Brazilian church had the people and a better understanding of the country, the American churches had the money. Besides that, the American boards were not fully convinced that the Brazilian church was ready for independence, and they were not always sensitive to the Brazilians' pleas.

Regarding the educational question, Pereira and others, including John Rockwell Smith, believed that the synod should finance the education of future ministers at the seminary in Nova Friburgo and parochial schools for the children of church members, while the board in New York wanted to focus on education for the Brazilian elite at Mackenzie. Smith presented a motion in that regard that was signed by several Brazilian pastors and PCUS

---

<sup>60</sup> Matos, *Os pioneiros Presbiterianos do Brasil*, 330–37.

missionaries but only one PCUSA missionary, John Kyle. Chamberlain and other PCUSA missionaries, some connected to Mackenzie, protested.

The last issue involving Pereira was the freemasonry question. By the late 1890s, he had radicalized his position, saying that Christian faith and freemasonry were incompatible. Although initially supported by members in his church, Pereira soon lost people (many connected to Mackenzie) who left to form the Second and Third Presbyterian Churches of São Paulo. This ironically also affected the seminary that Pereira had so ardently defended: in protest against the planting of a third church, the members of Pereira's church removed their offerings that would have been destined for missions. When the seminary was inaugurated, no member of the first church came to the ceremony.

Although many other pastors and missionaries agreed in principle with Pereira, they thought that he was becoming extreme in the way he defended his causes. They wanted to focus primarily on missions and evangelism but thought that Mackenzie was also a worthy project and that the two could be conciliated. Pereira disagreed and with some other pastors founded a new denomination in 1903. Regardless, despite his deepest fears that the denomination would lose its focus on missions and evangelism, the Presbyterian Church in Brazil remained fairly conservative for many years after, being able to conciliate traditional evangelism and social work, especially through Mackenzie.<sup>61</sup>

## Conclusion

As far as we can tell, all the missionaries commissioned by the PCUSA and the PCUS to plant churches in Brazil in the nineteenth century were solidly conservative in their theology. Their main doctrinal influence was the Old School Theology cemented by Charles Hodge in Princeton and Dabney in the South. These missionaries tried to educate the early Brazilian pastors in a similar vein.

Some Brazilian social reformers, such as Aureliano Candido Tavares Bastos, tried to enlist the missionaries to their cause, with little success, except when it touched on the theme of religious liberty. Apart from Fletcher, the American missionaries were unwilling to be involved with Brazilian politics. Choosing between social reform and personal evangelism was no hard task for them. Before going to seminary, Simonton wrote the following in his diary:

---

<sup>61</sup> Ribeiro, *Igreja Evangélica e República Brasileira*, 205–9.

I do not hold that change is progress or revolution, reformation. Besides reforming has become a trade and many quacks finding it a profitable one are dabbling in it. ... they are anti-religious, assuming that Christianity has failed to accomplish the regeneration of mankind and that it must give place to some more powerful agency.<sup>62</sup>

It does not seem that his opinions changed in Brazil. Simonton was a staunch Republican and enthusiastic antislavery advocate, but he was not in Brazil to subvert the monarchy or free the slaves. He was in Brazil to insert into the national religious system a new denomination formed by people who had had a transforming personal experience with God.<sup>63</sup> Being liberal was not enough. It was necessary to be godly.<sup>64</sup> Ironically, however, Fletcher had a more important role than the other missionaries realized at the time. His work helped to consolidate the political environment that would be favorable to missionary work.

The initial history of the Presbyterian Church in Brazil was deeply marked by the choice between personal evangelism and social reform. The main division in the young Brazilian Synod concerned education, mainly the role of Mackenzie. Eduardo Carlos Pereira represented a more radical, but not entirely unusual, stance on this topic: he feared that the United States churches, especially the PCUSA, were ignorant of the needs of the Brazilian church. Eventually, Pereira became alienated from most of his initial supporters.

Despite the division between personal evangelism and social reform, some pastors believed that the two issues were not necessarily incompatible. They occupied a middle ground, especially when it concerned education. Many Protestant schools were planted in the nineteenth century, and these schools attracted the elite that to a significant degree would rule the country in the First Republic.

---

<sup>62</sup> Simonton, *Diário*, 81–82.

<sup>63</sup> Ribeiro, *Protestantismo e Cultura Brasileira*, 26–27.

<sup>64</sup> Vieira, *O Protestantismo*, 139–40. As a final note, the tension between missionaries in Brazil was far from unique. Similar tensions happened throughout the missionary enterprise in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, and even before. See William R. Hutchison, *Errand to the World: American Protestant Thought and Foreign Missions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).